



NOAA FISHERIES

Atlantic Highly Migratory Species

Atlantic Bluefin Tuna General Category Fishery: NMFS Adjusts Daily Retention Limit for January 2014 Subquota Period

December 20, 2013

Actions being taken and important dates

The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) adjusts the General category (commercial handgear) Atlantic bluefin tuna (BFT) retention limit for the January subquota period to two large medium or giant BFT (measuring 73" or greater) per vessel per day/trip. Although it is called the "January subquota," the regulations allow the General category fishery under this quota to continue until the 23.1-mt subquota is reached or March 31, whichever comes first. Hence, this retention limit adjustment is *effective January 1 through March 31, 2014*, or until the January subquota is reached, *whichever comes first*. In accordance with NMFS regulations, the default retention limit would otherwise have been one large medium or giant BFT per vessel per day/trip beginning January 1, 2014.

Based on fishery performance over the last several years, NMFS anticipates that the default one-fish limit likely would be overly restrictive and would not support the objective of providing opportunities to harvest the full January subquota without exceeding it. Although NMFS has the regulatory authority to set the daily retention limit to up to five fish, the rate of harvest of the January subquota could be accelerated under a higher limit (and higher fish availability) and result in a relatively short fishing season. A short fishing season may preclude or reduce fishing opportunities for some individuals or geographic areas. Therefore, in order to maintain an equitable distribution of fishing opportunities, a retention limit closer to the low end of the allowable range of retention limits (i.e., two fish) is warranted. A potential ancillary benefit of a subquota period that is open for an extended duration is that any scientific information (including biological samples) collected from BFT may be from fish collected over a broader temporal and geographic range than currently sampled. Lastly, fishery participants have supported this retention limit in prior seasons.

NMFS takes this action after considering the regulatory determination criteria regarding inseason adjustments, which include, among other things, available quota, fishery performance in recent years, the anticipated availability of BFT on the fishing grounds, and the effects of the adjustment on the BFT stock and on accomplishing the objectives of the 2006 Consolidated Highly Migratory Species (HMS) Fishery Management Plan. This adjustment is intended to provide opportunities to harvest the available U.S. BFT quota without exceeding it; preserve the opportunity for General category fishermen to participate in the winter BFT fishery in the mid-Atlantic region that typically begins in December when commercial-sized BFT become available in that area; help achieve optimum yield in the General category BFT fishery; and collect a broad range of data for stock monitoring purposes.

Through December 31, 2013, the current General category retention limit of five large medium or giant BFT per vessel per day/trip remains in effect. For more information on BFT fishing regulations, including recreational size and retention limits, please go to hmspermits.noaa.gov.

Who is affected?

The General category daily retention limit applies to vessels permitted in the **commercial** Atlantic tunas General category and the HMS Charter/Headboat category while fishing commercially. This limit is effective for all areas except for the Gulf of Mexico, which is designated as BFT spawning grounds and where NMFS does not allow targeted fishing. Regardless of the duration of a fishing trip, the daily retention limit applies upon landing. For example (and specific to the retention limit for the January 2014 subquota period), whether a vessel fishing under the General category limit takes a two-day trip or makes two trips in one day, the daily limit of two fish may not be exceeded upon landing.

NMFS will continue to monitor the fishery closely through dealer reports. Depending on fishing effort and catch rates, NMFS may determine that additional retention limit adjustments or fishery closure are necessary to ensure available quota is not exceeded or to enhance scientific data collection from, and fishing opportunities in, all geographic areas.

NMFS regulations at 50 CFR 635.21(a)(1) require that all BFT that are released be handled in a manner that will maximize survivability, and without removing the fish from the water. For additional information on safe handling, see the Careful Catch and Release brochure available at www.nmfs.noaa.gov/sfa/hms/.

This notice is a courtesy to BFT fishery permit holders to help keep you informed about the fishery. For additional information, call (888) 872-8862 or (978) 281-9260, or go to hmspermits.noaa.gov. Official notice of Federal fishery actions is made through filing such notice with the Office of the Federal Register.

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